

# Historic Resources

*As the City of Fairfax celebrated 50 years as an independent city and more than 200 years as the crossroads of Northern Virginia in 2011, we are reminded of the importance of the City's rich heritage, which continues to provide a sense of identity, stability and continuity.*

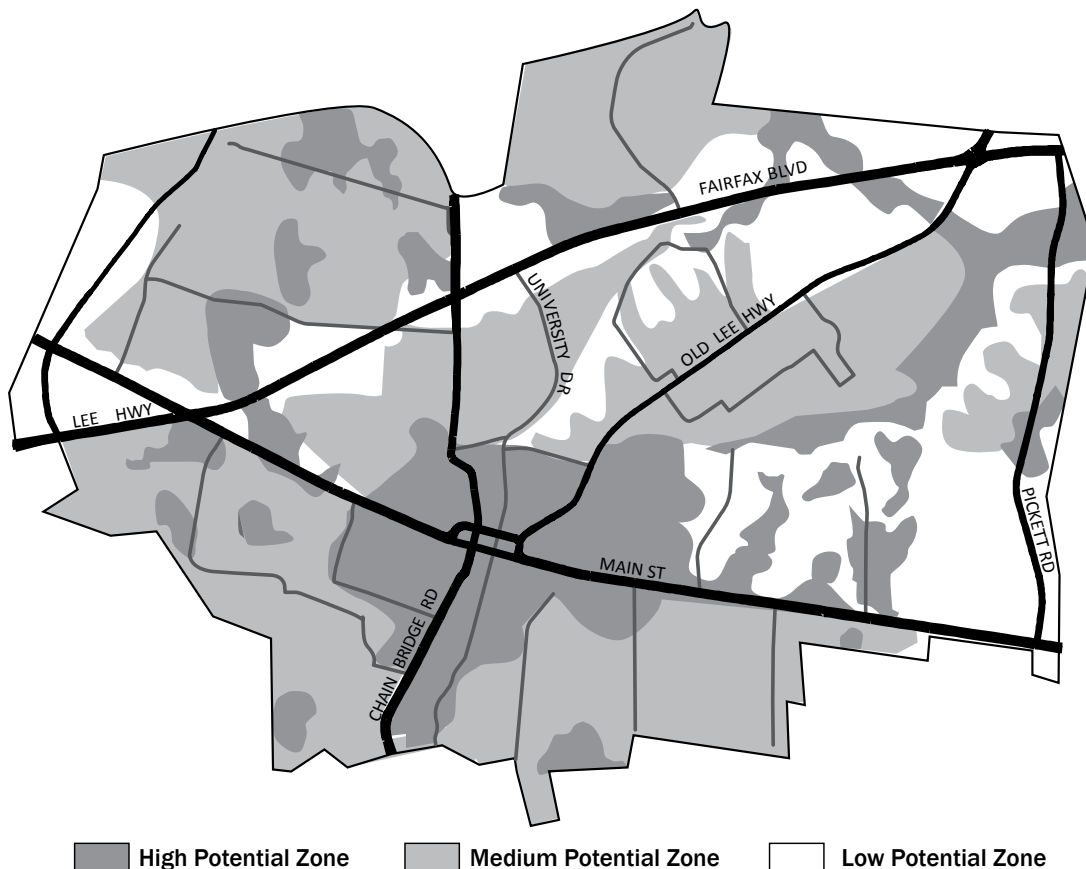
## Historic and Archaeological Resources

The City's inventory of historic resources reflects the interplay of local growth patterns, public policies and private actions and continuing identification efforts. The majority of historic architectural resources are concentrated in Old Town Fairfax, the traditional core of the City. However, surveys conducted by the City since the late 1970s have identified a wide range of resources throughout the

City, including commercial, institutional and residential structures, buildings and objects. Over 110 buildings and structures have been surveyed and documented, as well as six cemeteries and one archaeological site.

A citywide archaeological reconnaissance survey completed in early 1994 identified areas of high, medium and low potential for archaeological significance (see Map HSR-1). In 2008 the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research at The College of William and Mary conducted a thematic survey of Civil War archaeological sites within

Map HSR-1  
**Potential Archaeological Resource Areas**



Source: Garrow and Associates, Inc., 6/94

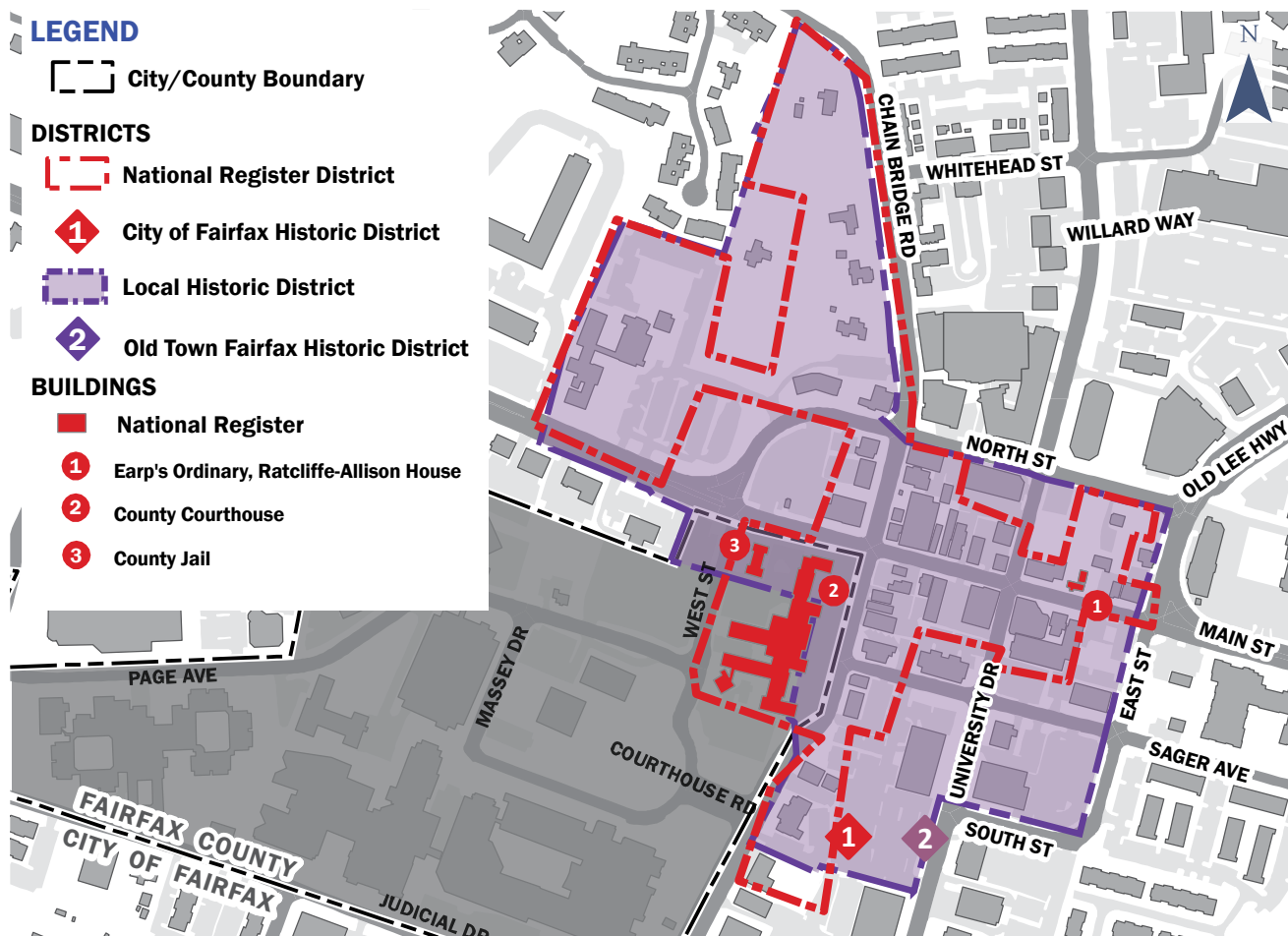
the City. The Center's findings, published as a complete report titled *Comprehensive Report: Thematic Survey of Civil War Archaeological Resources in the City of Fairfax, Virginia* and as summary booklet, identified 93 Civil War locations in total during the study with field inspection of 62 locations resulting in the identification of 25 newly recorded and three previously recorded archaeological sites, as well as four isolated finds.

Among the City's most significant historic properties are a group of nineteenth and early twentieth century structures in the National Register City of Fairfax Historic District within Old Town Fairfax. By contrast, the Tastee 29 Diner, located on Fairfax Boulevard, erected in 1940, is nationally significant as an excellent example of "streamline moderne" roadside architecture.

## Districts

The City has one National Register district, the City of Fairfax Historic District (see Map HSR-2). Within the National Register City of Fairfax Historic District, there are 52 buildings, 10 other structures and a monument, most of which are classified as "contributing" elements. Six of those buildings predate 1850, 14 were constructed around the turn of the 20th century and an additional 12 date from the 1920s and early 1930s. Approximately three-fourths of the buildings in the district are used for commercial purposes. Among the most notable historic buildings in Old Town Fairfax are the Fairfax County Courthouse, the William Gunnell House, the Ratcliffe-Allison House, Old Town Hall and the Ford Building. The second floor of Old Town Hall houses the Huddleson Library, a collection of Civil War works and Virginia history books. Many of the other downtown historic structures are former residences that have been converted into office or retail space.

Map HSR-2  
**National Register Historic District Map**



Source: City of Fairfax CDP, 2011

The City has four local historic districts identified as zoning overlay districts (see Map HSR-3): Old Town Fairfax Historic District, Fairfax Public School Historic District, Blenheim Historic District and the John C. Wood House Historic District. The City's Old Town Fairfax District boundary does not exactly match the boundary of the National Register District and has a more than 10 acre larger area. The Fairfax Public School Historic District is comprised of the less than half acre property of the former Fairfax Elementary School listed on the National Register, now used as a Museum and Visitor's Center. The Blenheim Historic District is comprised of the 12 acres of the National Register listed Blenheim (Wilcoxon Place) Estate. The John C. Wood House Historic District was added in September 2010. The house on the property was the home of the City's first Mayor who was influential in the incorporation and later expansion of the City and location of George Mason University. The District is located in one of the oldest residential neighborhoods in the City.

## ***Properties***

The City has four individual properties on the National Register (see Map HSR-3): the Fairfax Public School (now the Fairfax Museum and Visitors Center), the Ratcliffe-Allison House on Main Street, Blenheim, and the Tastee 29 Diner on Fairfax Boulevard. The Tastee 29 Diner is also included in the multiple property Diners of Virginia, MPS district. In addition to the National Register Designation, these historic properties are also listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register.

There are many properties with historic characteristics that have not been designated at the State or National level. The Fairfax Boulevard corridor retains some excellent surviving examples of the architecture of the mid 20th Century. Significant properties also include a few surviving examples of large rural estates such as the Farr House, the Sisson House, Manassas Gap Railroad Bed as well as a grouping of historic residential properties in the Fairfax Triangle area, predominantly along Chain Bridge Road and Cedar Avenue.

## ***Cemeteries***

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources considers cemeteries or burial places to be historic if they meet, or are likely to meet, the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Thus a cemetery would be considered historic if it is (A) associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; (B) associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; (C) embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent

the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or (D) have the potential to yield information important in prehistory or history.

The City of Fairfax has six identified cemeteries (see Map HSR-3); the largest of which is the City of Fairfax Cemetery at just under 10 acres. The City Cemetery has been in continual use since 1866 when the land was purchased by the Ladies Memorial Association as a burial ground for Confederate soldiers who either lived or were killed in Fairfax County. In 1890 a nearly eighteen foot high gray granite obelisk was erected in the cemetery in a dedication to "the memory of the gallant sons of Fairfax." The Ratcliffe Cemetery, approximately 2 acres located in the middle of the block between Oliver and Moore Street, was surveyed in 2004 to map and record the graves and markers and define the boundary of cemetery. The land, purchased by Richard Ratcliffe, founder of the Town of Providence (the City's predecessor), has been in use as early as 1895. Records suggest 62 people are buried in the cemetery including several Ratcliffe family members, other non-family members and 36 Civil War soldiers, both Confederate and Union.

The City also contains the Jermantown Cemetery, one of the few remaining African-American historical sites in the area. According to the Fairfax County Cemetery Preservation Association (FCCPA), the Jermantown Cemetery was established in 1868 for black residents who could not be buried in the Fairfax City Cemetery near the courthouse. There are over 40 headstones and an undetermined number of unmarked graves. The Wilcoxon family cemetery occupies a 52.5 by 35 foot area at Blenheim. The cemetery consists of approximately fifteen graves with at least thirteen marked with headstones.








The other known cemeteries in the City do not have any known historic relevance at this time. The cemetery located at the rear of the Fairfax County's vehicle maintenance facility at 3609 Jermantown Road, across from Providence Elementary School was established in 1946 to provide a place of burial for indigent persons who die in Fairfax County and poor residents of Fairfax who cannot afford funeral expenses. The Sherman/Schurmann Family Cemetery is a small area located on the west side of Pickett Rd., across from 3420 Pickett Road which contains no visible grave markers, but a count of depressions indicates at least 12 burials.

Map HSR-3  
**Historic Resources Map**  
**Districts, Buildings and Cemeteries**








### HISTORIC CLASSIFICATIONS








#### DISTRICTS

-  National Register District
-  City of Fairfax Historic District
-  Local Historic District
-  Old Town Fairfax Historic District
-  Fairfax Public School Historic District
-  Blenheim Historic District
-  John C Wood House Historic District

#### BUILDINGS

-  National Register
-  Fairfax Public School
-  Ratcliffe-Allison House
-  Blenheim
-  Taste 29 Diner

#### CEMETERIES

-  Cemetery
-  City of Fairfax Cemetery
-  Ratcliffe Cemetery
-  Jermantown Cemetery
-  Wilcoxon Family Cemetery
-  Fairfax County Cemetery
-  Sherman/Schurmann Family Cemetery

## Recognition and Preservation of Historic Properties

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 and subsequent amendments to NHPA created the National Register of Historic Places to recognize properties of local, state and national significance. The National Register designation is an honorary recognition of the architectural and historical significance of buildings, structures, archaeological sites, monuments or districts. It imposes no architectural controls or property restrictions unless federal funds or actions are involved, triggering review of potential impacts. However, qualifying property owners are eligible for federal and state tax credits for the proper rehabilitation of individually recognized properties that contribute to National Register Districts and Virginia Landmarks Register.

Overlay historic district zoning is the primary tool available to the City for the local regulatory protection of historic properties. A district may be composed of many properties or may be a single property. As described previously, there are currently four local overlay districts within the City which impose special bulk, area and use restrictions and design controls on structures and sites. Within these districts, all proposed alterations, demolitions and new construction must be reviewed and approved by the City's Board of Architectural Review. In addition to these existing districts, the City should decide if there are any smaller pockets of historic properties that are worth designating as historic areas. Some of the housing areas near Chain Bridge Road north of Old Town could possibly qualify for such a designation.

In addition to the designation of overlay districts, the City can also attempt to preserve its built heritage through the careful selection of structures to be designated as historic properties. As time passes, additional properties within the City, such as turn of the twentieth century residences, have also become eligible for historic designation. Several of these structures also have ties to the lands of their original large-lot estates, which should be preserved along with the structure, if at all possible. The City should monitor the age and status of these properties, making efforts to attain historic designations for deserving structures whenever appropriate.

The *Design Guidelines—Old Town Fairfax Historic and Transition Districts* is used by the Board of Architectural Review to evaluate proposals for rehabilitation of existing structures and construction of new buildings in the City's

historic districts and the Transition Overlay District. In addition to providing guidelines for building and building features, landscaping and signs, the *Guidelines* reviews historic patterns of development in the City and offer a concise design profile of the City's Old Town Fairfax historic district. The variety of architectural styles and building features that create the character of the Old Town Fairfax district are described in detail in *Design Guidelines*.

## Partners in Preservation

Amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act adopted in 1980 served to substantially decentralize federal historic preservation programs and provide more involvement for local governments in National Register nominations, environmental reviews and funding for local historic preservation activities. The Certified Local Government program was designed to bring qualified local governments into full partnership with state and federal agencies in reviewing National Register nominations and to serve as a source of specially earmarked funds. The historic resources program in the City of Fairfax has grown over the years from a totally volunteer part-time staff to now include several paid staff positions and a fulltime Director of Historic Resources.

The City of Fairfax became a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1991 after the State Historic Preservation Office determined that the City's Board of Architectural Review and local historic preservation program met state and federal standards. Only 31 local governments throughout the State had attained CLG status as of September 2011. Annually 10 percent of a state's funding from the National Historic Preservation Fund must be passed along to CLGs. In each of the first three years as a CLG, the City competed for and received grants from this special funding set-aside. The first grant was used to hire a consultant to prepare successful National Register nominations for the Fairfax Public School and Tastee 29 Diner. The second grant funded a consultant to prepare the Old Town Fairfax Design Guidelines, which were adopted by the City Council in June 1993. A citywide archaeological reconnaissance survey, the topic of the third grant project, was completed in June 1994. More recently the City received a grant for a consultant to prepare the National Register of Historic Places nomination for Blenheim. The result of this process was that Blenheim was added to the register. In 2003 the City received another grant to update the citywide survey in 2003 and 2004.

Key to a successful historic preservation program in the City is a strong local network of organizations interested in the preservation of the City's heritage. These organizations



include Historic Fairfax City, Inc., the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Fairfax Coalition, the Woman's Club of Fairfax and the Fairfax Ferns Garden Club.

Historic Fairfax City, Inc. (HFCI) is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1983 with the purpose of promoting and preserving historic properties and increasing public appreciation and awareness of the history of the City and the surrounding area. HFCI acts in an advisory role to the City Council on historic preservation and has partnered with the City in historic restorations through private fundraising efforts. HFCI has been instrumental in the restoration of key historic properties including the Ratcliffe-Allison House, Old Town Hall, the Fairfax Museum and Visitors Center, and Historic Blenheim.

## Encouraging Preservation through Education

Through museum activities, special local tours, public meetings and presentations, HFCI contributes a valuable educational service to City residents and the entire Northern Virginia community. HFCI participates actively in the Sesquicentennial Committee which was charged with planning and coordinating events and programs to commemorate the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War and meet the goals of diversity, education, inclusiveness, and permanence.

The Fairfax Museum & Visitor Center is housed in the former Fairfax Elementary School, built in 1873 as the first two-story school in Fairfax County and listed on the National Register. The museum produces special exhibitions on city history, provides educational outreach to school and youth groups and offers walking tours of Old Town Fairfax and the city's historic buildings in the spring and fall.

The 4,000-square-foot Civil War Interpretive Center at Blenheim was opened in November 2008 to enhance the educational experience of the site for visitors. The gallery space provides a context for the Union soldiers at Blenheim within the larger framework of the Civil War. The 2nd floor and attic in the house are not currently accessible due to structural deficiencies which will be corrected during future restoration work. Therefore, the primary feature of the gallery is an ADA accessible replica of 2/3 of the house's attic with life-size images of the graffiti. The multi-purpose assembly room is a 925-square foot program space for

school groups, tour groups, lectures, and special programs. Temporary exhibits are also displayed on the walls.

In addition to the museum, sponsored programs and guided tours, residents and visitors to the City can learn more about historic properties and events from the numerous historic markers to commemorate people, places, or events of regional, statewide or national significance found throughout the City. The markers include those that have been placed under the Virginia Department of Historic Markers program and those sponsored by HFCI. Virginia's historical marker program began in 1927, making it one of the oldest such programs in the nation.

# Historic Resources—Goal, Objective & Strategies

*Goal: Protect and enhance the City’s historic resources for present and future residents. Objective HR-1 Preserve and promote the City’s historic resources.*

## Strategies

### **HR-1.1 Support the efforts of private individuals, businesses and groups in preserving, maintaining, and rehabilitating historic sites and structures.**

The City should continue to maintain an effective partnership with Historic Fairfax City Inc., the Downtown Fairfax Coalition, Women’s and Garden Clubs and similar organizations to preserve and maintain City-owned historic properties. The City should also serve as a repository of technical information and assistance for maintenance and rehabilitation of historic structures that are privately owned.

The City should ensure that all publicly owned historic properties are affirmatively maintained and respectfully rehabilitated. Stewardship of City-owned historic resources should be planned and provided for through the Capital Improvement Program process. The City should also encourage private owners of historic properties to take appropriate maintenance measures and rehabilitate properties according to the federal Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

### **HR-1.2 Promote greater public awareness of the City’s historic resources.**

The City’s historic heritage should be made accessible through a variety of ways, including: periodic special events (e.g. Civil War Weekend, Historic Homes Tours), supplemental programming contributions to annual City events (e.g. July 4, Fall Festival, Festival of Lights and Carols, Spotlight on the Arts), Civil War sesquicentennial commemorations starting in 2011, ongoing SOL-based school programs, seasonal walking tours, media programs produced by City cable television staff, presentations to civic and other groups, visitor information packet mailings, brochures, and the City Web site.

### **HR-1.3 Discourage demolition or inappropriate use of valuable historic resources.**

Where appropriate, the City should provide regulatory protection for threatened properties through historic district overlay zoning. During new development or redevelopment activities, proffers should be sought that document and protect historic resources. Respectful adaptive reuse of historic properties should be encouraged.

### **HR-1.4 Identify and recruit appropriate users for the City’s historic buildings.**

The revitalization of the City’s historic Old Town core is an important component of economic development of the City as a whole. Through its Economic Development Office, the City should actively seek to attract businesses to Old Town Fairfax that will revitalize the downtown area and showcase the City’s heritage.

### **HR-1.5 Maintain and update surveys of the City’s architectural resources.**

Initial surveys of the City’s historic resources have been completed. Some of the properties in the National Register City of Fairfax Historic District that were noncontributing because they were not yet 50 years old will soon be eligible for conversion to “contributing” status and therefore eligible for federal tax incentives. Regular updating of these surveys is important, since many more properties are approaching 50 years of age. Updates should include City-owned properties or those affiliated with the City in various ways (e.g. Barker House, Ratcliffe Cemetery).

### **HR-1.6 Design an archaeological preservation program based on a City-wide archaeological assessment.**

One of the City’s commitments as a Certified Local Government is to actively address assessment and preservation of its archaeological resources. A city-wide archaeological reconnaissance survey completed in early 1994 identified areas of low, medium and high archaeological potential. The City should actively

seek further studies and more in-depth surveys of high potential areas through development proffers, staff and volunteer research efforts, and grant-supported projects.

**HR-1.7 Maintain an effective partnership with state and federal agencies for historic preservation activities.**

The City's status as a Certified Local Government is dependent on maintenance of an ongoing historic preservation program with a qualified Board of Architectural Review (BAR). Members of the BAR should seek annual training opportunities to meet CLG requirements. City staff members should effectively perform all CLG-required activities including submission of an annual report to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, review of all federally-mandated environmental assessments related to historic preservation, coordinate with the BAR to review all National Register nominations from the City, and administer all CLG grant projects.

**HR-1.8 Seek National Register nomination of additional historic resources, as appropriate.**

The City should support individual property owners in seeking National Register designation for their properties. In addition, the City should initiate designation for publicly held properties, as appropriate. Examples of sites that may now or soon meet the designation criteria include Paul VI High School (formerly Fairfax High School), the Farr property, the Sisson House (currently used for School Board and Voter Registrar offices) on the City Hall grounds, and a potential residential historic district in the Fairfax Triangle area.

**HR-1.9 Seek additional sources of funding and technical assistance for historic preservation activities.**

The City should continue to explore participation in the Main Street program to obtain funding and technical assistance for revitalization and rehabilitation of historic properties in Old Town Fairfax. In addition, new federal funding opportunities under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) offer the potential for funding historic preservation activities along major transportation routes such as Main Street and Chain Bridge Road in the City.

**HR-1.10 Incorporate historic preservation as an integral component of Old Town redevelopment plans.**

Downtown redevelopment will dramatically impact the National Register Historic District. Redevelopment concepts and plans should be reviewed to en-

sure the retention of historic buildings, features and landscape elements that contribute to our downtown historic districts. Aspects including scale, compatibility and historic sightlines and viewsheds should be considered in all redevelopment plans. Adequate archaeological investigations should be executed prior to the redevelopment of particular parcels.

**HR-1.11 Stabilize the Blenheim House and complete its restoration as a key City historic site.**

The Blenheim House is a National Register-listed property containing the nation's best examples of Civil War soldier inscriptions and photographs left on house walls. Its 12-acre parcel also contributes to the preservation of open space within the City. The master plan for this site should be implemented to ensure stabilization and conservation of this valuable resource, as well as provide interpretation for local citizens and as a key element of the City's heritage tourism initiative.

**HR-1.12 Inventory City museum collections and ensure their conservation**

City collections contain a limited number of historic photographs, manuscripts, textiles, furniture and other objects related to City and regional history. A collections management plan should be completed and updated for these items and adequate conservation measures and storage facilities should be provided.

**HR-1.13 Contribute to the City's tourism initiatives**

City heritage is a primary reason visitors come to Fairfax. The Office of Historic Resources should continue to participate in these initiatives through collaboration with other City offices and local and regional players, including the Central Fairfax Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Civil War Trails, and the Virginia Tourism Corporation. The Fairfax Museum and Visitors Center should continue to be promoted as a key destination and starting point for visitors and tourists. The Museum and Visitor Center should be adequately supported to provide a positive initial experience for outside visitors and also serve as a local information center for area residents.

The Civil War sesquicentennial commemoration, which began in 2011, presents an opportunity for the promotion of the City's historic resources. A special promotion campaign and key events should be created to both bring visitors to the City and promote its historic status, for example arranging walking or driving tours that connect the City's notable Civil War resources, and connects with other resources in Fairfax County.